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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to provide guidelines for writers who are preparing new materials as well as to offer suggestions to language teachers who must use prescribed texts. The basic assumption is that scientific grammars only describe the production of language by native speakers, while pedagogical grammars are sets of rules ordered in such a way as to most efficiently teach a non-native speaker to produce grammatical utterances in the target language. The paper deals with considerations that must be taken into account in sequencing the grammatical items and patterns chosen to be included in the pedagogical grammar. Frequency of use as well as difficulty for the learner will determine placement in the rule sequence. Several aspects of the problem of defining difficulty are presented along with information provided by contrastive analysis and error analysis. Additional considerations such as logical ordering, variety, re-entry (cycling), symmetry, and others are also discussed. (Author/AM)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMATICAL SEQUENCING IN MATERIALS ADAPTATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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The goal of most language teachers is to help their students achieve communicative competence in the target language. That is, to help them become not only linguistically competent, but also aware of the social rules of language use. To learn a new language, a student must learn to use a new grammar which is theoretically identical to the one which enables native speakers of the language to recognize grammatical sentences and to produce appropriate utterances in given social situations. This ability is the subject of linguistic investigation and the basis for the sets of patterns and hierarchies of rules called scientific grammars. Scientific grammars are designed to describe as economically as possible what the native speaker knows about his language; thus they define the substance that a language student must learn, but they are not designed to help him learn it. The gap between the language learner's first efforts and communicative competence in the target language is bridged by a different type of grammar--the pedagogical grammar. As defined by Sol Saporta (1966:83), this type of grammar is a device consisting of selected grammatical patterns and drills that will lead the student step by step to recognize and produce grammatical target-language utterances. The notion that segmenting a language into patterns for pedagogical purposes is upheld by Krashen and Seliger who have suggested that the isolation of rules and words in the target language is a crucial element in formal language instruction (1975: 181). The next question is whether or not the patterns in the pedagogical grammar should be presented in any systematized way. In other words, is arranging grammatical patterns into a careful sequence worth the effort? Oller states that psycholinguistic research has shown that organization facilitates verbal processing (perception, production, and learning) (1972:100), so it would seem that a properly sequenced pedagogical grammar would enhance language learning.

Of course, the ultimately effective pedagogical grammar would be based on a thorough knowledge of what happens psychologically as a person comes to master a second language. Since this knowledge is not available to us presently, we must trust to observations of learners' performances in the target language to give us clues as to how to optimally arrange the patterns. In these observations, contrastive analysis and error analysis are very useful--contrastive analysis because it can explain why some patterns are difficult for certain groups of students, and error analysis because it points up generalized learner strategies in internalizing the rules of a particular target language. The sequencing of grammatical patterns is an attempt on the part of instructors and materials writers to anticipate the students' needs in achieving communicative competence, and to arrange the materials to facilitate learning.

Several considerations influence the sequencing of the patterns that have been selected to appear in the pedagogical grammar. The first of these is functional load.[1] The functional load of a pattern or lexical item refers to its communicative importance in normal discourse. The concept of functional load can be broken down into three sub-categories: frequency of use, utility, and commonality. Some patterns are used more often than others in daily conversation--these patterns have a high frequency of use and, therefore, carry a high functional load. An example from English of a frequently-used structure would be the WH question pattern which students must know early in order to converse efficiently in English. Another aspect of functional load is what Larsen has called utility (1975: 159). Certain words and expressions that have special salience for students who find themselves in particular social situations are communicatively important. For example, a student in an urban setting may need to know expressions like "local" or "express," "out of order," and "Straight up or on the rocks?" while a student in a rural setting

[1] This term is borrowed from Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965:292-293), but it has been redefined.

might not find these as useful as "nightcrawler" of "hayride." Certain patterns may also have utility for students who intend to use English for a specific purpose, such as reading technical literature. In this situation, the passive voice would be high in utility for these particular students and carry a higher functional load than it normally would. The third aspect of functional load, commonality,[2] refers to terms that are not necessarily used frequently, but which refer to common items in the environment that do not lend themselves to easy circumlocution. Words like "comb" and "socks" are examples of this type. Certain expressions which are expected in certain social situations also fit into this category. "How do you do?" and "God bless you" are high in commonality and, therefore, in functional load.

[2] This concept is found in Gougenheim, Rivenc, Michea, and Sauvegeot where it is described as part of la disponibitité. (1964:138-139).

Patterns with high functional load should be placed toward the beginning of a pedagogical grammar for at least two reasons. First, early presentation will afford the students the opportunity to practice these important patterns and reinforce them often throughout their training in the language. Second, early familiarity with these patterns will allow the student to communicate in authentic language from his very first lessons. The psychological advantanges that accrue to this in terms of confidence and enthusiasm cannot be over-emphasized.

An equally important consideration in the sequencing of patterns is difficulty. The problem of defining exactly what constitutes a difficult pattern has been discussed at length by many authors. Some, such as Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin, have defined difficulty in terms of contrastive analysis (1965: 282-283). According to this view the most difficult patterns for the learner would be those which had no counterpart in his mother tongue. This is an intuitively appealing analysis of

difficulty; but, in practice, contrastive analysis has proved to be of more use in explaining learners' errors than in predicting them. Others have based their definitions of difficulty on the sequence of patterns acquired by children who are learning the target language as their mother tongue. This version of difficulty says that the child progresses from easy structures to harder ones; therefore, the difficult patterns in a language are those that children acquire last. The problem here is that children do not have all the intellectual capacities that adult learners have, and what is difficult for first language learners may not be difficult for second language learners. Difficulty has also been tied to the various theoretical orientations. For example, sentences requiring transformations are often said to be more difficult than kernel sentences. The problem here is that as theories change, so must definitions of difficulty, and the fact is that certain patterns are always difficult for certain groups of speakers no matter where they fit into the theoretical plan. Mere length of the pattern has also been held up as a criterion for judging difficulty--the shorter, the easier, of course. However, some patterns that students find difficult are shorter than others that are easy to learn. (Larsen, 1975: 155-158). Moreover, Perkins and Yorio (as cited by Larsen, 1975: 157) have shown that errors do not appear to be related to sentence length. These are but a few of the definitions of difficulty that have been proffered; and, while all of them have merit, none has been wholly successful in evaluating what exactly constitutes difficulty for the learner. Perhaps this is because each theory has approached difficulty through only one dimension. Buteau goss one step further and offers a two-dimensional definition where she views linguistic difficulty as a function of the possible alternatives, and psychological difficulty as a function of the student's awareness of contextual cues (1974: 31). Perhaps the difficulty

of a pattern can better be described as a constellation of factors. For example, there is a facet of difficulty which can be called difficulty of concept. By this I mear that the language learner has to rearrange his perception of objective reality to agree with the way in which native speakers of the target language perceive the same phenomena. To illustrate, the segmentation of time varies quite a bit between English and Spanish, and this difference has linguistic repercussions in terms of which tense is appropriate in a given situation. Both Spanish-speaking students of English and English-speaking students of Spanish find tenses difficult to manipulate properly. There is also a facet of difficulty related to learning new ways of expressing concepts already present in the native language. For example, if the native language marks tense by inserting particles, or time words, and the target language uses inflected verb stems to accomplish the same purpose, the student may find the transition difficult to effect. This situation is illustrated by Chinese-speaking students of English who have trouble remembering to inflect English verb forms. After the new concepts have been understood and the new patterns learned, there remains the difficulty of internalizing them so that their production is rapid and effortless. Other facets of difficulty include sociolinguistic considerations that involve learning which style to use in a given situation, and which answer is appropriate to a given question. For example, the student must learn that while "ain't" might be acceptable in a gathering of students, it is not acceptable at a formal reception. Likewise, he must learn to answer, "Take an express bus," rather than, "I drive my car," when asked, "How do you get downtown?" All of these factors,and undoubtedly many more, make up the difficulty of a particular pattern. Until a more workable definition appears, the best determiner of difficulty for the materials writer or instructor is his own experience in teaching. The patterns

which give the students trouble are the difficult ones. This description of difficulty may be circular, but it seems to me that it is the most practical way to describe the patterns that cause problems for the students.

If materials writers are to make use of the concept of difficulty, they must arrange the patterns they have selected for the pedagogical grammar into a hierarchy of difficulty. It seems to me that they can look to their intended audiences to orient themselves. By this I mean that if the materials are meant for students whose language background is homogeneous, a hierarchy of difficulty based (although not entirely) on a contrastive-analysis version of difficulty would be in order. On the other hand, if the students are of diverse language backgrounds, the contrastive analysis approach breaks down. Here a hierarchy of difficulty based on inherent difficulties in the language might be a better axis of orientation.

Once a hierarchy of difficulty has been determined, the next question is how to use it. The traditional way has been to teach the easier patterns before the harder ones; but it seems that perhaps there is an advantage to placing some of the more difficult patterns toward the beginning of the sequence, especially if they carry a high functional load. In this way, the students would be learning immediately useful expressions quickly, and would be practicing and reinforcing difficult patterns from the outset of the course.

Functional load and difficulty are considerations that bear on every pattern and lexical item to be sequenced. The other considerations do not apply in every case and do not fall into any hierarchy of importance. The first of these is <u>progressive ordering</u>. This refers to the ordering that is found, for example, in teaching the past tense of <u>have</u> before the past perfect is presented; or in teaching yes/no questions, which involve subject-auxiliary inversion, before WH questions, which add another element

to the pattern. Another aspect of progressive ordering is to present simpler forms of a basic pattern before more complex forms are taught. For example, in teaching possession, to teach the singular forms before the plural forms would be more efficient and cause less confusion.

Another consideration, that of co-occurrence involves presenting at the same time forms that usually occur together. For example, teaching the adverbs here and there in the same lesson with the demonstrative adjectives would focus the learner's attention on the semantic links between the two groups of words and facilitate learning.

Variety is also important to effective grammatical sequencing. It is important because a natural language consists of a variety of structures; therefore, a student needs to know several different patterns from the beginning in order to be able to communicate effectively. If he were taught nothing but statement structures for the first two months he would find interacting with native speakers difficult to say the least. A no less important aspect of variety is the fact that too many similar patterns presented together tend to confuse the student. Patterns that are almost identical, such as gerunds and participles, should be presented in separate lessons.

Keep in mind that material once presented, must be periodically reviewed. This brings us to the consideration of cycling which refers to re-entering material that has been presented previously. Cycling often occurs in conjunction with the presentation of a new but similar pattern to the one being cycled. For example, in teaching a new verb tense, the previously-learned tenses would be reviewed by contrasting their forms and functions with the form and function of the tense being introduced. However, not all patterns require such intensive review as they would receive in a formal grammatical explication. These patterns can be sufficiently reviewed and practiced in subsequent drills and dialogues. For example, the

plural could be practiced in a drill focusing on single-word adjective placement. This can be done without calling the students' attention to the fact that the plural is also part of the instructional content of the drill.

A final consideration is that of internal symmetry. In any language certain systems exist, some grammatical and some semantic which form closed groups of words. Examples of such systems are the days of the week, the months of the year, sets of pronouns, etc. When there is danger of the students'making false analogies, these groups should be taught as wholes. For example, if the reflexive pronouns myself and ourselves were presented by themselves, the language learner could quite conceivably conclude that the third person forms were *hisself and *theirselves. So it would be wisest to teach this set as a whole. There is an opposite side to the coin, however. Some sets of words, especially those that are semantically rather than grammatically linked, cause confusion when they are taught at the same time. For example, opposites such as push and pull have been known to cause "mental blocks" in students as to which word is which. In cases like this, where members of the set could be easily confused with one another, it is better to think of internal symmetry as something to be avoided.

Up to now we have been discussing the total sequence of patterns in the grammar. We need to say a word about the sequencing of drills designed to teach and practice given patterns. The drills should proceed from mechanical drills where the student learns how to form the new pattern, through meaningful drills where the student has the opportunity to select a grammatical answer from the sentences he has practiced, to communicative drills where the student gives the class new information using the newly-

learned pattern. This is the sequence Mary Bruder uses in MMC. The amount of teacher control of student output goes from total control to a considerable degree of freedom to use the pattern expressively. In the end, this type of sequencing is more important than overall pattern sequencing which can be specially modified for a certain group of learners.

So far we have been speaking of materials development, but these considerations can also be of use to teachers who have been assigned to use particular texts. In order to adapt existing materials the instructor must first take an inventory of the patterns covered in the book. He should then add any patterns or lexical items that he feels are necessary to the development of his students' communicative competence. If he encounters any patterns that he deems irrelevent, he can discard them at this time. He should then look at the inventory of patterns and measure their sequence against the considerations just mentioned. If he decides that the patterns are not sequenced well, he should reorder them at this point. After reordering the patterns, he should ascertain whether or not the later chapters are structurally dependent on the earlier ones. If they are not, the patterns and drills may be moved around easily--this is to say with only minor lexical changes. If, however, later patterns are based on earlier ones, it won't be possible to simply move a drill toward the beginning of the grammar because it will very probably involve structures with which the students are unfamiliar. If this is the case, it will be necessary to modify the existing drills or to write new ones. (An excellent source for ways to adapt and write drills is Christina Paulston and Mary Bruder's From Substitution to Substance, published by Newbury House.) If at any point the teacher feels that seeing the materials as they are printed would be detrimental to the students, he should not hesitate to bypass the book and use handouts. One final note of caution: if materials are to be adapted, they should be adapted as a whole before the teacher begins to

use them in the classroom. A clear overview of the direction of the pedagogical grammar will facilitate the development of communicative competence.

To summarize the main points of grammatical sequencing, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the pedagogical grammar is to help students achieve communicative competence in the target language as quickly and easily as possible. For this reason, the placement of any particular pattern should be based primarily on a consideration of its functional load and its difficulty. The higher the functional load of a structure, the closer it should be to the beginning of the grammar. However, patterns are optimally ordered from easy to more difficult, so for each pattern on the list, the materials writer must weigh both factors simultaneously. Some fairly difficult patterns carrying high functional loads will be placed toward the beginning of the grammar while others, with lower functional loads, will come later. The other considerations do not fall into any fixed hierarchy, but should be measured against each pattern to determine whether or not they are applicable.

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